

Butterfly notes from the Greenwich district, S.E. London

Our Editor, Colin Plant, in his admirable book *The Butterflies of the London Area* (1987), gives (p.23) a most useful analysis of the species found to occur in each of the thirty-three London Boroughs during the period 1980 to 1986. Allowing for minor changes and perhaps a few losses, the position is doubtless not very different today, a decade later. The list for my borough, Greenwich, there stands at 19 species, to which I am able to add three – bringing it up to 22 (an average figure for the London area) assuming no losses in the meantime.

1. Large Skipper. An unexpected absentee from the 1987 list, and in a different class from the two following which are clearly newcomers. It was not scarce annually in my former garden at Blackheath (first noticed some time before 1950), and likewise in my present one at Charlton every year up to 1996 when it apparently failed; also sparingly but frequently throughout the district.

2. Orange-tip. In previous notes I have already recorded the first modern appearance of *A. cardamines* at Shooters Hill and Woolwich Common; since when, in 1994, it appeared in a third locality: Maryon-Wilson Park, Charlton, in one area only where the cuckoo-flower grows. None, however, could be seen there during the past two seasons, which I put down to the appalling summer droughts. Happily, however, the butterfly has fared somewhat better in its other station here, Woolwich Common; where, in its very restricted haunt, two males were noted in flight last year (4.v.1996). May was so wintry with us as probably to disfavour the Orange-tip which, hereabouts, seems almost over by June, and its status in the local fauna must be regarded as precarious. It seems to me that in our climate the species can suffer through being only single-brooded!

3. Gatekeeper. The one outstanding success-story among Charlton butterflies in 1966: in just one season it has become common in apparently all suitable places. First seen here only a few years ago, and till now confined in my vicinity to a very small part of a lightly-wooded area of Woolwich Common, except for a few stragglers – the same area in which the Orange-tip first appeared, but a shadier part of it. It was a pleasure to see Gatekeepers freely mingling with Meadow Browns at *Buddleia* flowers in the garden in July and August; and during the same period along waysides, field edges etc., usually in company with Meadow Browns and in similar numbers, or *tithonus* might even slightly outnumber *jurtina* here and there. It seems strange that the former has taken so long to reach us here; I never saw it in all my years at Blackheath. In this it contrasts strikingly with the Essex Skipper, which arrived here long ago and become locally the most abundant butterfly.

Of the other resident species listed for Greenwich Borough in 1987, I have yet to meet with the Grizzled Skipper (which could well occur on Woolwich Common); the Purple Hairstreak (probably present in the Shooters Hill woods but very easily missed); and the Brimstone, whose foodplants are absent locally. I have not for several years seen the Wall, previously not uncommon in two restricted sites: a field edge at Kidbrooke, and a short riverside stretch of Charlton Reach approaching Greenwich, at both of which there has been severe disturbance. It would be premature to write off *L. megera* as a loss to the Borough – though indeed it may be – because so many apparently suitable spots remain, and, as just noted, the butterfly can be very local.

Further species that have shown a drastic reduction in numbers here in 1996 are: Speckled Wood (scarce also in 1995 after a period of increase; a fine late female at ivy-bloom, 18.x.93, in a north-east wind after frost, is perhaps worth mention); Small Heath (not seen at all, though noted each year on Woolwich Common up to then); and Small Tortoiseshell (only two met with, besides a small colony of larvae at Kidbrooke). For what is supposed to be the commonest British butterfly, this degree of rarity surely calls for some explanation – has it been the general experience last year?– A.A. ALLEN, 49 Montcalm Road, Charlton, London SE7 8QG.

***Cicones undatus* Guér. (Col.: Colydiidae) and other beetles on sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* killed by sooty bark disease at Grafham, Huntingdonshire**

Following Mendel and Owen's discovery of *Cicones undatus* under sycamore bark in Windsor Great Park in 1984 (1987, *Ent. Rec.* **99**: 93-95) and Jones' account of a diverse and rare beetle fauna associated with sooty bark disease on sycamore at Nunhead Cemetery between 1988 and 1992 (1993, *ibid.* **105**: 1-10), I enquired of Mr D. Evans, Tree Officer for Huntingdon District Council, whether the disease had been reported from the old County of Huntingdonshire. He was aware of one earlier localised outbreak in a large garden at Alconbury, but the infected trees had long been felled and removed from the site.

Sooty bark disease is caused by an ascomycete fungus *Cryptostoma corticale* Ell. & Ev. which, in Britain, is almost confined to sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* L., although it occurs occasionally on other species of *Acer* and horse chestnut *Aesculus hippocastanum* L. Strouts and Winter (1994, *Diagnosis of ill-health in trees*, HMSO) state that this disease was first recorded in Great Britain in London during 1948. They add that "the fungus is widespread on dead wood, but requires long, hot, dry summers to cause disease", and conclude that "outbreaks are, therefore, sporadic and concentrated in the southern half of the country". However, David Rose of the Forestry Authority's Pathology Diagnostics Advisory Service at Alice